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Opening Extract from...

Burning Angels

Written by Bear Grylls

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Daily Mail, August 2015

Nazi Gold Train is FOUND: deathbed confession leads treasure hunters to secret location as Polish officials claim they have seen proof on radar.

A Nazi gold train has been found in Poland after the man who helped hide it at the end of the Second World War revealed its location in a deathbed confession. Two men, a German and a Pole, last week claimed they had found the train – believed to contain treasure – close to the small town of Walbrzych in south-west Poland.

Piotr Zuchowski, Poland's National Heritage and Conservation Officer, said: 'We do not know what is inside the train. Probably military equipment, but also jewellery, works of art and archive documents. Armoured trains from this period were used to carry extremely valuable items, and this is an armoured train.'

Local lore says Nazi Germany ordered the vast underground rail network, which snakes around the massive Ksiaz Castle, be built to hide Third Reich valuables. Concentration camp inmates were used to build the huge tunnels – code-named Riese (Giant) – to use as production spaces for strategic weapons, as the site was safe from Allied air raids.

Sun, October 2015

History tells us that the Special Air Service regiment created in 1942 was disbanded in 1945 . . . But a new book by acclaimed historian Damien Lewis has revealed that in fact one lone, top secret 30-man SAS unit fought on. This group 'went dark' at the end of the war to go on an unofficial mission to hunt down Nazi war criminals.

Their aim was to find the SS and Gestapo monsters who had murdered their captured comrades, as well as hundreds of French civilians who had tried to help them. By 1948 the band had captured more than 100 of the war's worst killers – many of whom had avoided facing justice at Nuremberg in 1945 and 1946 – and brought them to trial.

This tiny SAS unit, dubbed 'the Secret Hunters' was run from a shadow HQ based in the Hyde Park Hotel in London. It was funded off the books by an exiled Russian aristocrat working for the British War Office, Prince Yuri Galitzine.

And it was members of this group who were the earliest to uncover the full horror of the Nazi extermination camps . . . The Natzweiler concentration camp near Strasbourg had been the scene of horrific experiments by the Nazis. It was there that commandant Josef Kramer experimented with the technique of using gas to murder Jewish prisoners.

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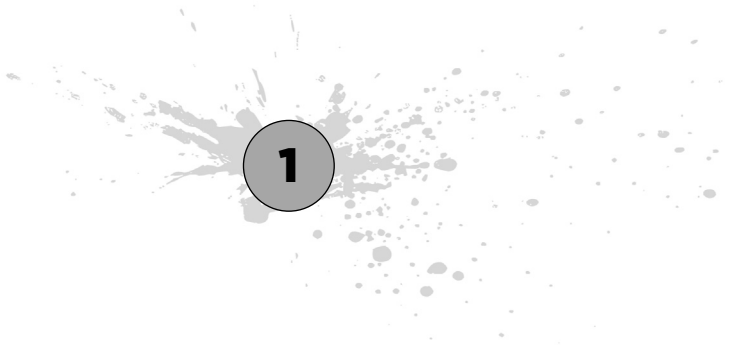
BBC, January 2016

OETZI THE ICEMAN HAD A STOMACH BUG, RESEARCHERS SAY.

Microbes extracted from the insides of a 5,300-year-old mummy have shown he was suffering from a stomach bug before he died, scientists have discovered. Oetzi the Iceman, the name given to the frozen body discovered in the Alps in 1991, had a bacterial infection that is common today, researchers said.

A genetic analysis of the bacteria – *Helicobacter pylori* – was carried out, helping to trace the history of the microbe, which is closely linked to the history of human migration.

Professor Albert Zink, head of the Institute for Mummies and the Iceman, at the European Academy in Bolzano, said: 'One of the first challenges was to obtain samples from the stomach without doing damage to the mummy. Therefore we had to completely defrost the mummy, and could finally get access by an opening . . .'



1

16 October 1942, Helheim Glacier, Greenland

SS Lieutenant Herman Wirth brushed aside the flakes of swirling snow that obscured his vision. He forced himself closer, so that his face and hers were barely a foot apart. As he stared through the intervening mass of ice he let out a strangled gasp.

The woman's eyes were wide open, even in her death throes. Sure enough, they were sky blue – just as he'd known they would be. But there his hopes came to a sudden, crashing end.

Her eyes drilled into his. Crazed. Glazed. Zombie-like. A pair of red-hot gun barrels boring into him from out of the translucent block of ice that held her.

Unbelievably, when this woman had fallen to her death to be entombed within the glacier, she had been crying tears of blood. Wirth could see where the oozing, frothy redness had streamed from her eye sockets, only to be frozen into immortality.

He forced himself to break eye contact and flicked his gaze lower, towards her mouth. It was one that he had spent countless nights fantasising about, as he shivered in the Arctic cold that penetrated even his thick goose-down sleeping bag.

He had envisaged her lips in his mind. He'd dreamed about them ceaselessly. They would be full and pouting and gorgeously pink, he'd told himself; the mouth of a perfect Germanic maid who had waited five thousand years for a kiss to revive her.

His kiss.

But the more he looked, the more he felt a wave of revulsion rise within his guts. He turned and dry-retched into the icy blast of wind that seared and howled through the crevasse.

In truth, hers would be the kiss of death; the embrace of a she-devil.

The woman's mouth was encrusted with a deep red mass – a frozen bolus of engorged blood. It thrust into the ice before her like a ghastly swirling funeral shroud. And above the mouth, her nose too had been voiding a tidal wave of crimson fluid, a gruesome haemorrhage.

He swung his gaze lower and to left and right, letting his eyes rove across her frozen, naked flesh. For some reason this woman of the Ancients had torn off her clothes, before crawling across the ice sheet and stumbling blindly into this crevasse that cut through the glacier. She had come to rest on an ice shelf, becoming frozen solid within a matter of hours.

Perfectly preserved . . . but far from perfect.

Wirth could barely believe it, but even the ice woman's armpits were streaked with thick, stringy beads of crimson fluid. Before she had died – *as* she had died – this so-called Nordic ancestor goddess had been sweating out her very lifeblood.

He let his gaze creep lower still, dreading what he would find there. He was not mistaken. A thick frozen smear of red surrounded her nether regions. Even as she had lain there, her heart pounding its last, thick gouts of putrid blood had flowed from her loins.

Wirth turned and vomited.

He heaved the contents of his stomach through the wire mesh of the cage, seeing the watery liquid splatter deep into the shadows far below. He retched until there was nothing left, the dry heaving subsiding into short, stabbing, painful gasps.

Hands clawing at the mesh, he hauled himself off his knees. He glanced upwards at the glaring floodlights, which threw a fierce, unforgiving blaze into the shadowed ice chasm, reflecting all around him in a crazy kaleidoscope of frozen colour.

Kammler's so-called Var – his beloved ancient Nordic princess: well, the General was welcome to her!

SS General Hans Kammler: what in the name of God was Wirth going to tell – and show – him? The famed SS commander had flown all this way to witness her glorious liberation from the ice, and the promise of her resurrection, so that he could deliver the news in person to the Führer.

Hitler's dream, finally brought to fruition.

And now this.

Wirth forced his gaze back to the corpse. The longer he studied it, the more horrified he became. It was as if the ice maiden's body had been at war with itself; as if it had rejected its own innards, disgorging them from every orifice. If she had died like this, her blood and guts becoming frozen within the ice, she must have been alive and bleeding for some considerable time.

Wirth didn't believe any more that it was the fall into the crevasse that had killed her. Or the cold. It was whatever ancient, devilish sickness had held her in its grasp as she stumbled and crawled her way across the glacier.

But weeping blood?

Vomiting blood?

Sweating blood?

Urinating blood, even?

What in the name of God would cause that?

What in the name of God had killed her?

This was far from being the ancestral Aryan mother figure they had all hoped for. This wasn't the Nordic warrior goddess he had dreamed of for countless nights – proving a glorious Aryan lineage stretching back five thousand years. This was no ancient mother to the Nazi *Übermensch* – a perfect blonde, blue-eyed Norse woman rescued from far before the reach of recorded history.

Hitler had thirsted for so long for such proof.

And now this – a devil woman.

As Wirth gazed into her tortured features – those empty, bulging, blood-encrusted eyes, full of the terrifying glaze of the walking dead – he was struck by a sudden blinding realisation.

Somehow he knew that he was staring through a doorway into the very gates of hell.

He stumbled backwards from the ice corpse, reaching above his head and tugging violently on the signal rope. 'Up! Get me up! Up! Start the winch!'

Above him an engine roared into life. Wirth felt the cage lurch into motion. As it began to lift, the horrifying, bloodied block of ice retreated from his view.

The dawn sun was throwing a faint blush across the wind- and ice-whipped snow as Wirth's hunched figure rose above the surface. He climbed exhaustedly from the cage and stepped on to the hard-packed, frozen whiteness, the sentries to either side attempting to click their heels as he passed. Their massive fur-lined boots made a dull clump, their rubber soles caked in a thick layer of ice.

Wirth snapped up a half-hearted salute, his mind lost in tortured thoughts. Setting his shoulders into the howling wind, he pulled his thick smock closer around his numb features and pushed onwards towards the nearby tent.

A savage blast whipped the black smoke away from the chimney that protruded through the roof. The stove had been stoked, no doubt in readiness for a hearty breakfast.

Wirth figured his three SS colleagues were already awake. They were early risers, and with today being the day the ice maiden would rise from her tomb, they would be doubly eager to face the dawn.

Originally there had been two fellow SS officers with him – First Lieutenant Otto Rahn and General Richard Darre. Then, with no warning, SS General Hans Kammler had flown in on an aircraft equipped with ice skids, to witness the final stages of this epic operation.

As the overall commander of the expedition, General Darre

was supposedly in charge, but no one was pretending that General Kammler didn't wield the real power. Kammler was Hitler's man. He had the Führer's ear. And in truth, Wirth had thrilled to the fact that the General had come to witness in person his moment of greatest triumph.

Back then, barely forty-eight hours earlier, things had been looking golden; the perfect ending to an impossibly ambitious undertaking. Yet this morning . . . Well, Wirth had little appetite to face the dawn, his breakfast, or his SS brethren.

Why was he even here? he wondered. Wirth styled himself as a scholar of ancient cultures and religions, which was what had first brought him to Himmler and Hitler's attention. He'd been awarded his Nazi party number by the Führer himself – a rare honour indeed.

In 1936 he had founded the Deutsche Ahnenerbe, the name meaning 'inherited from the forefathers'. Its mission was to prove that a mythical Nordic population had once ruled the world – the original Aryan race. Legend had it that a blonde, blue-eyed people had inhabited Hyperboria, a fabled frozen land of the north, which in turn had suggested the Arctic Circle.

Expeditions to Finland, Sweden and the Arctic had followed, but all without any great or earth-shattering revelations. Then a group of soldiers had been sent to Greenland to establish a weather station, and there they had heard tantalising reports that an ancient woman had been discovered entombed within the Greenland ice.

And so the present, fateful mission had been born.

In short, Wirth was an archaeological enthusiast and opportunist. He was no diehard Nazi, that was for sure. But as the Deutsche Ahnenerbe's president, he was forced to rub shoulders with the darkest fanatics of Hitler's regime – two of whom were in the tent before him right now.

He knew this would not end well for him. Too much had been promised – some of it directly to the Führer. Too many

lofty expectations, too many impossible hopes and ambitions hinged upon this moment.

Yet Wirth had seen her face, and the lady of the ice had the features of a monster.

2

Wirth ducked his head and thrust it through the double layer of thick canvas: one layer to keep out the murderous cold and the storm-whipped snow; the second, inner layer to keep in the heat thrown off by live human bodies and the roaring stove.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee hit him. Three pairs of eyes looked at him expectantly.

'My dear Wirth, why the long face?' General Kammler quipped. 'Today is the day!'

'You didn't drop our lovely *Frau* into the bottom of the crevasse?' Otto Rahn added, a wry grin twisting his features. 'Or try to kiss her awake, only to get slapped around the face for your troubles?'

Rahn and Kammler guffawed.

The diehard SS general and the somewhat effeminate palaeontologist seemed to share a peculiar brand of camaraderie. Like so much in the Reich, it made no sense to Wirth. As to the third seated figure – SS General Richard Walter Darre – he just scowled into his coffee, dark eyes smouldering under hooded brows, thin lips clamped tight shut as always.

'So, our ice maiden?' Kammler prompted. 'Is she ready for us?' He swept his hand across the breakfast spread. 'Or do we have our celebratory feast first?'

Wirth shuddered. He was still feeling nauseous. He figured it might be better if the three men got to see the Lady of the Ice before they ate.

'It's perhaps best, Herr General, to do this before your breakfast.'

'You seem downhearted, Herr Lieutenant,' Kammler prompted. 'Is she not all we were expecting? A blonde-haired, blue-eyed angel of the north?'

'You have freed her from the ice?' General Darre cut in. 'Her features are visible? What do they tell you about our Freyja?' Darre had borrowed the name of an ancient Norse goddess – meaning 'the lady' – for the woman entombed within the ice.

'Surely she is our Hariasa,' Rahn countered. 'Our Hariasa of the ancient north.' Hariasa was another Nordic deity; her name meant 'the goddess with the long hair'. Three days earlier, it had seemed entirely fitting.

For weeks the team had been carefully chipping away at the ice so as to enable a closer look. When finally they managed it, the ice maiden proved to be turned into the wall of the crevasse, with only her back showing. But it was enough. She had revealed herself to possess glorious tresses of long golden hair, plaited into thick braids.

At that discovery, Wirth, Rahn and Darre had felt a bolt of excitement burn through them. If her facial features likewise matched the Aryan racial model, they were home and dry. Hitler would shower his blessings upon them. All they needed to do was free her from the wall of the crevasse, turn the block of ice around and get a proper look at her.

Well, Wirth had had that look . . . and it was utterly stomach-churning.

'She's not quite what we were expecting, Herr Generals,' he stammered. 'It's best you come see for yourselves.'

Kammler was the first to his feet, a faint frown creasing his forehead. The SS General had appropriated the name of a third Nordic goddess for the frozen corpse. 'She will be cherished by all who set eyes upon her,' he had declared. 'That is why I have told the Führer that we have named her Var – "the beloved".'

Well, it would take a true saint to love that bloody, corrupted

corpse. And of one thing Wirth was certain: there were few saints in that tent right now.

He led the men across the ice, feeling as if he were heading his own funeral cortège. They entered the cage and were lowered, the floodlights flaring to life as they sank beneath the surface. Wirth had ordered the lights kept extinguished, unless someone was working on or inspecting the corpse. He didn't want the heat thrown off by the powerful illumination melting the ice and thawing out their lady-in-waiting. She would need to remain utterly deep-frozen for safe transport back to the Deutsche Ahnenerbe's headquarters in Berlin.

He glanced across the cage at Rahn. His face lay in dark shadow. No matter where he might be, Rahn wore a wide-brimmed black felt fedora hat. A self-styled bone-hunter and archaeological adventurer, he had adopted it as his trademark.

Wirth felt a certain camaraderie with the flamboyant Rahn. They shared the same hopes, passions and beliefs. And, of course, the same fears.

The cage came to a lurching halt. It swung back and forth for an instant like a crazed pendulum, before the chain holding it brought it to some kind of standstill.

Four sets of eyes stared into the face of the corpse entombed within the block of ice; ice that was streaked with hideous swirls of dark red. Wirth could sense the impact the apparition was having upon his SS colleagues. There was a stunned, disbelieving silence.

It was General Kammler who finally broke the quiet. He turned his gaze on Wirth. His face was inscrutable as ever, a cold reptilian look flaring behind his eyes.

'The Führer expects,' he announced quietly. 'We do not disappoint the Führer.' A pause. 'Make her a figure worthy of her name: of Var.'

Wirth shook his head disbelievingly. 'We go ahead as planned? But Herr General, the risks . . .'

'What risks, Herr Lieutenant?'

'We have no idea what killed her . . .' Wirth gestured at the corpse. 'What caused all—'

'There is no risk,' Kammler cut in. 'She came to grief on the ice cap five millennia ago. That's five thousand years. You will clean her up. Make her beautiful. Make her Nordic, Aryan . . . perfect. Make her fit for the Führer.'

'But how, Herr General?' Wirth queried. 'You have seen—'

'Unfreeze her, for God's sake,' Kammler cut in. He gestured at the block of ice. 'You Deutsche Ahnenerbe people have been experimenting on live humans – freezing and unfreezing them – for years, have you not?'

'We have, Herr General,' Wirth conceded. 'Not myself personally, but there have been human freezing experiments, plus the salt-water—'

'Spare me the details.' Kammler jabbed a gloved finger at the bloodied corpse. 'Breathe life into her. Whatever it takes, wipe that death's-head smile off her face. Banish that . . . look from her eyes. Make her suit the Führer's prettiest dreams.'

Wirth forced out a reply. 'Yes, Herr General.'

Kammler glanced from Wirth to Rahn. 'If you do not – if you fail in this task – on your heads be it.'

He yelled an order for the cage to be lifted skywards. They rose together in silence. When they reached the surface, Kammler turned to face the Deutsche Ahnenerbe men.

'I have little stomach for breakfast any more.' He clicked his heels together and gave the Nazi salute. '*Heil Hitler!*'

'*Heil Hitler*,' his SS colleagues echoed.

And with that, General Hans Kammler stalked across the ice, heading for his aircraft – and Germany.

3

Present day

The pilot of the C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft turned to eye Will Jaeger. 'Kinda overkill, buddy, hiring a whole C-130 for just you guys, eh?' He had a strong southern drawl, most likely Texas. 'There's just three of you, right?'

Through the doorway into the hold Jaeger eyed his two fellow warriors, seated on the fold-down canvas seats. 'Yeah. Just the three.'

'Bit over the top, wouldn't you say?'

Jaeger had boarded the aircraft as if ready to do a high-altitude parachute jump – decked out in full-face helmet, oxygen mask and bulky jumpsuit. The pilot had not the slightest hope of recognising him.

Not yet, anyway.

Jaeger shrugged. 'Yeah, well we were expecting more. You know how it is: some couldn't make it.' A pause. 'They got trapped in the Amazon.'

He let the last words hang in the air for a good few seconds.

'The Amazon?' the pilot queried. 'The jungle, right? What was it? Jump that went wrong?'

'Worse than that.' Jaeger loosened the straps that held his jump helmet tight, as if he needed to get some air. 'They didn't make it . . . because they died.'

The pilot did a double take. 'They died? Died like how? Some kinda skydiving accident?'

Jaeger spoke slowly now, emphasising every word. 'No. Not an accident. Not from where I was standing. More like very planned, very deliberate murder.'

'Murder? Shoot.' The pilot reached forward and eased off on the aircraft's throttles. 'We're nearing our cruise altitude . . . One-twenty minutes to the jump.' A pause. 'Murder? So who was murdered? And – heck – why?'

In answer, Jaeger removed his helmet completely. He still had his silk balaclava tight around his face, for warmth. He always wore one when leaping from thirty thousand feet. It could be colder than Everest at that kind of altitude.

The pilot still wouldn't be able to recognise him, but he would be able to see the look in Jaeger's eyes. And right now, it was one that could kill.

'I figure it was murder,' Jaeger repeated. 'Cold-blooded murder. Funny thing is – it all happened after a jump from a C-130.' He glanced around the cockpit. 'In fact, an aircraft pretty similar to this one . . .'

The pilot shook his head, nervousness creeping in. 'Buddy, you lost me . . . But hey, your voice sounds kinda familiar. That's the thing with you Brits – you all sound the goddam same, if you don't mind me sayin'.'

'I don't mind you saying.' Jaeger smiled. His eyes didn't. The look in them could have frozen blood. 'So, I figure you must've served with the SOAR. That's before you went private.'

'The SOAR?' The pilot sounded surprised. 'Yeah, as a matter of fact, I did. But how . . . Do I know you from somewhere?'

Jaeger's eyes hardened. 'Once a Night Stalker, always a Night Stalker – isn't that what they say?'

'Yeah, that's what they say.' The pilot sounded spooked now. 'But like I said, buddy, do I know you from somewhere?'

'Matter of fact, you do. Though I figure you're gonna wish you'd never met me. 'Cause right now, *buddy*, I'm your worst nightmare. Once upon a time, you flew me and my team into

the Amazon, and unfortunately no one got to live happily ever after . . .'

Three months earlier, Jaeger had led a ten-person team on an expedition into the Amazon, searching for a lost Second World War aircraft. They'd hired the same private air charter firm as now. En route the pilot had mentioned how he had served with the American military's Special Operations Aviation Regiment, also known as the Night Stalkers.

The SOAR was a unit that Jaeger knew well. Several times when he'd been serving in special forces, it was SOAR pilots who'd pulled him and his men out of the crap. The SOAR's motto was 'Death waits in the dark', but Jaeger had never once imagined that he and his team would end up being the target of it.

Jaeger reached up and ripped off his balaclava. 'Death waits in the dark . . . It sure did, especially when you helped guide in the hit. Very nearly got the whole lot of us killed.'

For an instant the pilot stared, eyes wide with disbelief. Then he turned to the figure seated beside him.

'Your aircraft, Dan,' he announced quietly, relinquishing the controls to his co-pilot. 'I need to have words with our . . . English friend here. And Dan, radio Dallas/Fort Worth. Abort the flight. We need them to route us—'

'I wouldn't do that,' Jaeger cut in. 'Not if I were you.'

The move had been so swift that the pilot had barely noticed, let alone had any chance to resist. Jaeger had whipped out a compact SIG Sauer P228 pistol from where it was concealed within his jumpsuit. It was the weapon of choice for elite operators, and he had the blunt-ended barrel pressed hard against the back of the pilot's head.

The colour had drained completely from the man's face. 'What . . . what the hell? You hijacking my aircraft?'

Jaeger smiled. 'You better believe it.' He addressed his next words to the co-pilot. 'You a former Night Stalker too? Or just another traitorous scumbag like your buddy here?'

'What do I tell him, Jim?' the co-pilot muttered. 'How do I answer this son of a—'

'I'll tell you how you answer,' Jaeger cut in, releasing the pilot's seat from its locked position, and swinging it violently around until the guy was facing him. He levelled the 9mm at the pilot's forehead. 'Swiftly, and truthfully, without deviation, or the first bullet blows his brains out.'

The pilot's eyes bulged. 'Freakin' tell him, Dan. This guy's crazy enough to do it.'

'Yeah, we were both SOAR,' the co-pilot rasped. 'Same unit.'

'Right, so why don't you show me what the SOAR can do. I knew you as the best. We all did in British special forces. Prove it. Set a course for Cuba. When we're across the US coastline and out of American airspace, drop down to wave-top level. I don't want anyone to know we're on our way.'

The co-pilot glanced at the pilot, who nodded. 'Just do it.'

'Setting a course for Cuba,' he confirmed, through gritted teeth. 'You got a specific destination in mind? 'Cause there's several thousand miles of Cuban coastline to choose from, if you know what I mean.'

'You're going to release us over a small island via parachute drop. You'll get the exact coordinates as we close in. I need us over that island immediately after sundown – so under cover of darkness. Set your airspeed to make that happen.'

'You don't want much,' the co-pilot growled.

'Keep us on course due south-east and steady. Meantime, I've got a few questions to ask your buddy here.'

Jaeger folded down the navigator's seat, positioned to the rear of the cockpit, and settled himself into it, lowering the SIG's barrel until it menaced the pilot's manhood.

'So. Questions,' he mused. 'Lots of questions.'

The pilot shrugged. 'Okay. Whatever. Shoot.'

Jaeger eyed the pistol for a brief moment, then smiled, evilly. 'You really want me to?'

The pilot scowled. 'Figure of speech.'

'Question one. Why did you send my team to their deaths in the Amazon?'

'Hey, I didn't know. No one said anything about any killin'.'

Jaeger's grip on the pistol tightened. 'Answer the question.'

'Money,' the pilot muttered. 'Ain't it always thus. But hell, I didn't know they were gonna try and kill you all.'

Jaeger ignored the man's protestations. 'How much?'

'Enough.'

'How much?'

'One hundred and forty thousand dollars.'

'Okay, let's do the maths. We lost seven. Twenty thousand dollars a life. I'd say you sold us cheap.'

The pilot threw up his hands. 'Hey, I had no freakin' idea! They tried to wipe you out? The hell was I supposed to know!'

'Who paid you?'

The pilot hesitated. 'Some Brazilian guy. Local. Met him in a bar.'

Jaeger snorted. He didn't believe a word, but he had to keep pressing. He needed details. Some actionable intelligence. Something to help him hunt down his real enemies. 'You got a name?'

'Yeah. Andrei.'

'Andrei. A Brazilian named Andrei you met in a bar?'

'Yeah, well maybe he didn't sound too Brazilian. More like Russian.'

'Good. It's healthy to remember. Especially when you've got a 9mm pointed at your balls.'

'I ain't forgettin'.'

'So, this Andrei the Russian you met in a bar – got any sense who he might have worked for?'

'Only thing I knew was some guy named Vladimir was the boss.' He paused. 'Whoever killed your people, he's the guy giving the orders.'

Vladimir. Jaeger had heard his name before. He'd figured he

was the gang leader, though there were certain to be other, more powerful people above him.

'You ever met this Vladimir? Got a look at him?'

The pilot shook his head. 'No.'

'But you took the money anyway.'

'Yeah. I took the money.'

'Twenty thousand dollars for each of my guys. What did you do – throw a pool party? Take the kids to Disney?'

The pilot didn't answer. His jaw jutted defiantly. Jaeger was tempted to smash the butt of the pistol into the guy's head, but he needed him conscious and compos mentis.

He needed him to fly this aircraft as never before, and get them over their fast-approaching target.